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UNRESOLVED BORDER SANITATION PROBLEMS

Our renewed efforts since late 1981 to obtain Mexico's cooperation to stop sewage flows into the United States have been only partially effective. Mexico was not giving high priority to resolving border sanitation problems even before its current economic problems began, in spite of treaty commitments, International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) recommendations approved by the two governments, and high-level US diplomatic representations. With the onset of Mexico's economic crisis last year, even the modest accomplishments resulting from these efforts were set back. Seriously polluted waters increasingly threaten the health and well-being of peoples on both sides of the border at Tijuana, Mexicali, Nuevo Laredo and Nogales.

At Tijuana, a critical part of corrective works under construction was suspended in December 1982 when funds ran out. Although new funding is reported to have been allocated by the Secretariat of Urban Development and Ecology, the responsible domestic agency, construction has not yet been resumed. These works, when completed, will help with immediate needs at Tijuana, but will not resolve the upcoming problems there. Corrective works at Mexicali, Nuevo Laredo and Nogales have also been stopped or slowed down for lack of money. The GOM proposes taking a step-by-step approach which would result in only partially correcting the problems. The GOM has yet to indicate its willingness or ability to provide the large amounts of money needed to resolve the problems in the future.

US IBWC Commissioner Joseph Friedkin estimates that as much as \$200 million may be needed for construction of sewage treatment and disposal works in Mexico to resolve the worst problems along the border for the next 10 years. The Commissioner estimates that the cost would be doubled if such works were to be built in the United States under a unilateral approach funded by the US Congress.

Ambassador Gavin wrote to Foreign Secretary Sepulveda on June 7, 1983, stressing the seriousness of the situation and the need for a broader approach to the problems than the piecemeal method taken by Mexico in the past. The Ambassador suggested the possibility of Mexico seeking a multilateral development bank loan to construct facilities over the next 10 years which would resolve all the problems along the border. On July 27, the Foreign Ministry agreed with our proposal that, as a first step, the IBWC arrange a bilateral meeting at Ciudad Juarez on August 4-5 to evaluate these problems and to develop a cost estimate for their correction.

July 29, 1983

State Dept. review completed

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